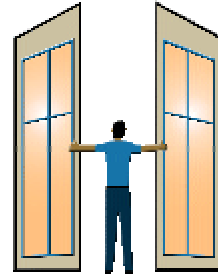


## **Program Opens Doors for Ex-Offenders**



Opening doors to better communication, hope and opportunity, Opening Doors of Ohio, a faith-based non-profit corporation, has a four-prong program which enhances prisoner re-entry into society and strengthens their families.

Its inmate program, Opening Doors<sup>sm</sup>, is facilitated by volunteers and trained inmates, with all learning taking place through activities rather than textbooks or videos. “As you experience something and talk about it, you translate that to life in general,” says Deborah Roeger, executive director of Opening Doors. “It moves head knowledge to heart knowledge quite effectively.”

Another program, Opening Doors in the Workplace<sup>sm</sup>, utilizes the same format but focuses on staff, work teams and the workplace. It enables prison staff to become familiar with the Opening Doors<sup>sm</sup> principles being taught to inmates.

Just one prison can generate from 1000 to 1500 prayer requests each week. Opening Doors’ main office receives all requests and sends them out to churches, other prisons, prayer ministries and individuals. The next step is to take requests from the outside church and send them in to inmate intercessors inside the prisons.

Stand in the Gap,<sup>tm</sup> Ohio is a new ministry, concerning prisoner re-entry which begins with an assessment while an individual is still incarcerated. If the program will be a good fit for that person, he or she is linked with a spiritual family from the faith community for at least the first year. According to Roeger, as they become a functioning family. “both the ex-offender and faith volunteers have their needs served.”

Opening Doors of Ohio began its work at Marion Correctional Institution in 2000. Roeger recalls, “When I began volunteering at Marion Correctional, I did not realize the director of Ohio’s Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections would ask us to take the program to other Ohio prisons,” which took place in 2002.

Opening Doors<sup>sm</sup> has completed programs in eight Ohio prisons and has an invitation from the Ohio Rehabilitation and Corrections Department to expand into other adult prisons in Ohio. A similar invitation has been extended by the Department of Youth Services to begin programs in Ohio’s youth facilities.

It will use its 2004-2005 Compassion Capital Sub-Award grant for fund development consulting, website creation and marketing materials.

Awaiting funding is a new effort, Opening Doors in the Family<sup>sm</sup> which will use experienced family mediators to facilitate family communications.. Roeger points out that recidivism is greatly reduced when family is “there” for newly released prisoners. Both the Ohio Department of Youth Services and the Ohio Department of Rehab and Corrections have expressed strong interest in using mediation to reconnect families.

“The entire composite of what we’re doing is building and strengthening relationships, as part of a five-stage growth process,” says Roeger. “What makes us unique is the use of interactive learning and laying a strong foundation before growth is expected. Most other programs start too far into the process.” Interest in the Opening Doors<sup>sm</sup> model has come from such places as Oklahoma, Texas, Florida and England.